

# Award-winning hobby grows into business for retired captain

**BY JENNIFER E. WEST**

Nucleus staff writer

A request to take pictures at her brother's naval military basic training graduation started a lifelong hobby that now has become a small business for Kelly Aldrich. Mrs. Aldrich is a former Air Force captain who last served at the Airborne Laser at Kirtland AFB before retiring from the Air Force in early 2004.

"I borrowed my sister's little 110 millimeter (camera)," Mrs. Aldrich said.

Years later, while on vacation in Alaska with her husband, Mrs. Aldrich took photographs, thinking, "Hey, we need these pictures."

By then, she'd graduated to using a 35mm camera.

In the early days of her hobby, the captain explained, "I would go around taking pictures, but it wasn't like I always had my camera in my hands." But her love of flowers encouraged her desire to become a photographer.

"I loved flowers...I was always trying to take pictures of flowers, always trying to be all artsy, until about 1998," she explained.

The Alaskan cruise was a turning point, one that caused her to visit the BX at her installation to upgrade her equipment.

"For the first time, I could get up close on a flower and could see through the viewfinder what I was going to get (in the actual photograph)," she explained. Then, she said, "I started going crazy."

In the years since, the captain garnered numerous awards for her photography in installation photo contests. The contest categories forced her to begin expanding her variety of subject matter to allow photo entries in more contest categories than "Nature."

Photo entries at Edwards AFB, Calif., won her a few local contests and her first Air Force Materiel Command judging in 2000. After arriving at Kirtland AFB, Captain Aldrich won numerous awards locally for two consecutive years.

With encouragement to submit her work to the Kirtland Nucleus, Captain Aldrich was on her way to learning

news photography. Her shot of Bataan Death March survivor retired Master Sgt. Frank Lovato in his wheelchair at the Prisoners of War/Missing in Action ceremony in 2003 was featured on the front page of the Sept. 26 Nucleus. That photo was among her local photo contest winnings. Photos for her unit have also been printed in the installation paper.

"It actually was the base contests, starting at Edwards (AFB) that kind of started this whole thing," Mrs. Aldrich explained. "...then I started winning here and having things in the paper."

Serving on a Kirtland AFB committee for the Tribute to Women in the Military, the former captain met a member of the New Mexico Veterans Me-

morial board of governors. The member was seeking veteran artists to display work in the memorial's visitor center for three months.

"Then I got someone who saw my stuff at the memorial and wanted to buy some of my work. It kind of took off from there," she explained.

After joining the New Mexico Veterans Art, she placed first and second on her first contest. Her work also has been exhibited in and on sale at the Kirtland Gallery in the BX. Mrs. Aldrich also has recently exhibited her work in the "One on One" veterans show at the Galleria in downtown Albuquerque.

"I knew I was leaving active duty and figured I could do a home business

that I could have fun with," she explained. "I went to the Family Support Center to find out about starting a small business."

At the Family Support Center, Mrs. Aldrich was able to use the "How to Start a Small Business" program and was assisted in completing paperwork and to get a business license.

As a small business owner, Mrs. Aldrich began pounding the pavement to find potential markets for her photographs.

"I started in the East Mountains, which is close to home," Mrs. Aldrich explained. "There are still lots more places I could approach—I just haven't had time!"

One place she has been able to market her cards with nature photographs is the gift shop at the Albuquerque Bio Park, a project that is large scale for a one-person business venture.

"It's all about calling and asking people and showing them my stuff," she added. "It's pretty cool."

"And, honestly, I have to say it all started with the base photo contests."



Photo by Damian Bohannon

**Former Air Force Capt. Kelly Aldrich's fascination with photographing nature blossomed into a small business after she separated from the military.**

**The 2004 Artist-Craftsman and Photography Contests entries are due at the Skills Development Center by 2 p.m., Oct. 15.**

**Judging will be Oct. 25 and entrants will be notified and invited to the Nov. 4 awards presentation.**

**Visit the Skills Development Center for contest guidelines and entry forms with model release forms.**

**Photography categories are monochrome prints, color prints, color transparencies, digital photos. Within those categories, subjects are people, nature/scenic, creative effects and computer imaging and enhancement.**

**Artist/craftsman categories for adults and for entrants 17 years and younger are fine art, textile art, industrial art and multicrafts/pattern art.**

## Air Force Safety Center Media Branch recognized for excellence

The Air Force Safety Center Media Branch recently received a 2004 APEX Award of Excellence and three 2004 Crystal Awards of Excellence. These honors, in separate national and international contests, recognize superior achievement in print publications.

APEX is the Awards for Publication Excellence competition, sponsored each year by the editors of *Writing That Works*, a newsletter for professional communicators who write, edit and manage business publications. This nationwide contest is open to communicators in corporate, nonprofit and independent settings.

*Road & Rec*, the Air Force journal of occupational, recreational and driving safety, placed in the top 10 percent of nearly 800 entries in the APEX Awards "Magazines & Journals" category. The award criteria were excellence in graphic design, editorial content and the success of the entry in achieving overall communications effectiveness and excellence.

Additionally, the Media Branch's three magazines—*Flying Safety*, *Road & Rec*, and *Weapons Journal*—each won Crystal Awards of Excellence in the 2004 Communicator

Awards "Print Media" category. The publications placed in the top 10 percent of more than 3,000 entries, including those from some of the world's largest corporations. This year's win makes four Communicator Awards for *Flying Safety Magazine*, three for *Road & Rec* and two for *Weapons Journal*.

The Crystal Award of Excellence goes to those entries whose ability to communicate puts them among the best in the field. This competition is open internationally to all companies, organizations or individuals involved in producing any kind of communication materials for external or internal audiences.

Communicator Award winners are producing outstanding work that is highly regarded by their peers. All work is judged solely on its own quality, creativity and resourcefulness. Each entry is carefully scrutinized and graded by award-winning professionals, chosen based on their extensive experience and proven creativity in the communications field. Entries are judged against a high standard of excellence, rather than against each other.

## Annual CFC kicks off

The 2004-2005 Combined Federal Campaign runs for six consecutive weeks Sept. 1 through Dec. 15 for bases within the continental United States.

At Kirtland AFB, the CFC kicks-off with a barbeque at the Rio Grande Community Center, Sept. 28, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Call Maj. Kathy Goforth at 846-2939.

The CFC was established in 1961 and is the largest workplace charity campaign in the country. This annual fall fund-raising drive allows nearly four million federal employees and military personnel to contribute to thousands of local and national non-profit organizations.

Last year, federal employees and military reached into their pockets to donate nearly \$250 million to the CFC. Contributions can be in cash, check or by payroll deduction.

On average, one in four Federal employees or their dependents will benefit from the CFC charities this year alone, according to officials. Donors may designate which charity, or charities, receives their money by filling out a pledge card.

Local CFC project officers have more information. The CFC Web site is [www.opm.gov/cfc](http://www.opm.gov/cfc).